

EDITORIAL

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Editing a general issue of *Couple and Family Psychoanalysis* is both fascinating and challenging: fascinating, because the themes of the articles are diverse and often surprising; challenging, because it can be difficult to find an editorial thread that connects them. What is presented to the reader is a snapshot of work that is currently going on in the relatively small but growing field that unites our community of couple and family psychotherapists.

As always, it tends to be what is new and different that attracts attention. So it is appropriate that this issue opens with an article from a Brazilian author who has not previously published in the field of couple and family psychoanalysis. Eva Chaska Uchitel Tesch is the first winner of the New Writer Prize, an initiative taken by the founding editor of the journal, Molly Ludlam, in 2020 (a year that contains numbers associated with vision). The editors are delighted to publish this article, whose author was profiled in the previous issue of this journal. What is described is a brief, psychoanalytically informed intervention with a family, which was conducted online. Link theory and object relations concepts are drawn upon to focus attention on the intersubjective nature of encounters that were significantly affected by the enforced medium of online therapy. The comment of the Awards Panel—“we were immediately engaged by the author’s refreshing spirit of curiosity about whose suffering she was being asked to address, and by her spontaneous capacity to adapt to limitations”—is likely to be endorsed by the experience of reading this article.

Psychoanalysis and developmental psychology share a concern with the relationship between internal and external realities. Within the clinical setting, the starting point is often to hear how people speak about their experiences as an expression of unconscious conflicts arising within their inner worlds. Famously, Freud (1900a) described dreams as the “royal road to the unconscious”. Whilst acknowledging that the unconscious of an individual can impact on another without passing through the consciousness of either (hence the significance of transference), the content to be unveiled by dreams is often considered to reside primarily within the patient, the role of the analyst being to provide an interpretation that reveals its unconscious motivation.

This perspective is modified by two articles that examine the nature of dreamwork. The first is Anna Maria Nicolò’s contribution, which extends the context in which dreams are to be understood beyond the confines of the intrapsychic to include interpersonal realities within couples and families, realities that bind the members together. The defensive organisation of a group may result in an unconscious collusion to delegate one of its members to give expression to shared anxieties through his or her dreams, a phenomenon that parallels the recognition that individuals may unconsciously be delegated by

families to behave in ways that either attract attention to, or distract attention from, fears associated with acknowledging source problems. A consequence of extending the context within which dreams are to be understood in this way is to include the therapist and his or her analytic setting. An implication of this is that dreamwork does not delegate the role of interpretation to the therapist, but makes it a function of the group as a whole. The creative potential of this shift underscores the importance for couple and family psychotherapists of attending to the significance of dreams as a link between *all* who are privy to hearing them.

Anna Nicolò's Italian colleagues, Fabio Monguzzi and Giulio Cesare Zavattini, develop these themes, considering dreams to have an intersubjective function as well as source. From the perspective of link theory, dreams are depicted as carriers of emotion, which, because of the context in which they surface, affect the atmosphere of the whole field of the psychotherapeutic endeavour. Dreams serve not only to organise experience for linked individuals but also to communicate about emotional states that may unconsciously be constructed between them and their therapists. Attention then moves from "ego" towards "we-go", and invites us to think about the narration of a dream in a session as a present moment event involving everyone present, and not simply as the recounting of a past episode.

Following this excursion into dreamwork are two articles that, in the tradition of developmental psychology, assume an observing role to understand and relate to problematic self-other states. From Australia, Ken Israelstam considers the clinical utility of Tronick and Cohn's (1989) "still face" experiments in which the responses of infants to their mothers' unresponsiveness were studied to access their emotions. Here, what Stern (1998) referred to as the "observed infant" is taken as the point of departure for thinking about therapeutic work with adult couples, in contrast to therapists inferring what childhood might have been like for their patients from how they present as adults—what he termed "clinical infants". This distinction invites what Ogden (2019) has described as an ontological approach to therapy (working with what is observed and experienced) as distinct from an epistemological approach (where experience is filtered through a body of knowledge in order to arrive at understanding). The distinction is not a hard and fast one, and through observing his own emotional responses to the behaviour of a couple in therapy, Israelstam highlights the role of countertransference in enabling contact to be made with emotions that were troubling the partners, utilising both ontological and epistemological stances in his work.

A non-clinical approach to learning through observation is adopted by Nevenka Badnjarević and Jasmina Nedeljković in describing a research project that interrogated the relationship between adult attachment and modes of resolving conflict for couples in therapy. Practising in Serbia, they investigated the attachment styles of two groups: one was seeking help to mend their relationship, the other to manage divorce. Unusually for a clinical population, a high proportion in both groups were rated as dismissing in attachment style, a defensive organisation that seeks to minimise access to affect.

Perhaps less surprising was the association between this and poor conflict management skills.

The value of research comes as much from describing questions raised by processes of enquiry, from contextualising variables that affect assignment to categories, and from thinking about the implications of the results obtained, as from the results themselves. Every researcher knows that the key to a good study is clearly defining the question to be explored, refining it as much as possible, and pursuing the least intrusive methodology in the hope of coming up with objectively reliable answers. Bowlby (1988) described the tension between research and clinical endeavours when he noted that the former required paring down variables to be studied as much as possible, whereas the latter required the opposite. Both approaches are driven by curiosity and the discipline of enquiry. Despite the different extents of their reach each is now challenged by the reality that, in the field of human relationships, it is often only through observing the interaction of subjectivities that the seemingly senseless can make sense.

Whilst, for the first time in this journal, all the authors contributing articles to this issue reside outside the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America, there is an original contribution from the UK. Curiosity is the centrepiece of Philip Stokoe's article, which formed the 27th Enid Balint memorial lecture. Enid Balint is the closest Tavistock Relationships has come to identifying a founding mother, and she modelled the spirit of curiosity and inquisitive thinking in her work and writings. In a closely argued lecture interweaving evolutionary biology, Freudian drive theory, Klein's account of split states of mind, and Bion's theory of knowledge, Stokoe posits curiosity as an innate drive, linked to the capacity to reflect rather than to know, resulting from engagement with environmental realities, and constituting a feature of the human mind that has accounted for the success of the species. He contrasts curiosity and unconscious beliefs through representing the latter as the defensive drive for certainty, a retreat from realities that kill off curiosity. From his long experience of working with adolescents he offers a valuable perspective on the debate about gender dysphoria, an issue that has dismayed many working in the Tavistock Clinic as a result of practices that have developed in its specialist unit. (Monzo's book review, which appears later in this issue, provides a detailed account of why the Tavistock's Gender Identity Development Service has so disturbed the psychoanalytic community.)

Responding to the lecture, Stanley Ruszczynski, also from the UK, turns to Enid Balint's published work, finding her comments about the conditions conducive to developing a healthy sense of self both supportive of, and challenging to, Stokoe's arguments. The condition Ruszczynski focuses on is, first, the maternal containment that provides infants with the safety to explore, and, second, the containment that allows children to engage with the reality of there being others of importance to their mothers (or those who have primary responsibility for their care) with whom they cannot compete. Containment makes curiosity safe, so the question posed is whether curiosity (as an innate drive or motivator) is a precursor to, or consequence of, containment

(something that is relationship-dependent). Either way (or both ways), linking curiosity with the space that allows for creativity circles back to the comment of the assessing panel about the opening article in this issue: “we were immediately engaged by the author’s refreshing spirit of curiosity”.

Three book reviews and two arts reviews complete the main content in this issue. I have already made reference to Robert Monzo’s review of *Time to Think: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Tavistock’s Gender Service for Children*. This is followed by Catriona Wrottesley’s review of *Fratriarchy: The Sibling Trauma and the Law of the Mother*, a fascinating instatement of sibling relationships into the canon of psychoanalysis, including their potential unconsciously to affect dramas played out in adulthood. Third, Elle Sidel reviews two books of a more popular kind: *You, Me, and the Space Between Us: How to (Re)Build Your Relationship*, and *Five Arguments All Couples (Need to) Have: And Why the Washing Up Matters*. Co-authored by alumni of Tavistock Relationships, they represent a foray into the world of self-help publishing, and, as such, invite debate about the value of reaching people in this way.

The arts mirror relationship anxieties for everyone, creating a reflective space in which we are invited to look, listen, and, if we are lucky, learn from an experience that is both personal and set apart. Stephanie Bushell’s review of *Marriage*, a television drama depicting desperation in a twenty-seven-year-old relationship, is infused with feelings that dare not be expressed within the couple. Then Judith Jamieson and Perrine Moran adopt the novel format of recording a conversation between them following their visit to two art exhibitions. Both these reviews offer a reminder about how vital the arts are for promoting well-being and a sense of community.

As, of course, is the exchange of ideas and experiences between the writers and readers of this journal! Happy reading.

References

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